



October 16, 2023

To: Members of the House Human Services Committee

RE: Moorhead/Clay County Courthouse Informational Hearing

Dear Chair Fischer and Committee Members,

LSS is a statewide provider of essential services serving one in 65 Minnesotans every year. In 2022, LSS Behavioral Health provided supports to 2,886 people in 84 counties through 21,143 in-person therapy visits, 10,297 telehealth visits, 70 employer groups, 14 school partnerships, and 2 shelter-linked mental health partnerships. As a community-based provider serving children and families in many communities across the state, including Moorhead, we know all too well that in order to maintain access to mental health care for our neighbors we need immediate investment in rates for community-based mental health services.

We pride ourselves on working with anyone who contacts us and connecting them to a continuum of integrated services that reflect compassion, integrity, and respect. However, providers, including LSS, are experiencing multiple challenges to meet the mental health needs of Minnesotans who access community-based mental health services. Challenges include years of operating with reimbursement rates far below the true cost of service and a severe shortage of well-qualified and licensed mental health providers. Further, these challenges are compounded with an increase in demand for services and people seeking services with highly complex and acute care needs.

LSS sustains our mental health services because we know mental health is a foundation for health and well-being. Access to mental health care is essential, especially for those who are also navigating significant life challenges including financial challenges, housing instability, and food insecurity. LSS is committed to maintaining and sustaining access to mental health services across the state and has continued to significantly subsidize these services to protect access for all who come through our doors regardless of the type of insurance they have or how they will pay for services.

On Wednesday, October 11, 2023, DHS publicly released the preliminary Minnesota Health Care Programs Fee for Service Outpatient Services Rates Study Legislative Report which reinforces a high need for rate methodology reform, a high need for rate updates, and a high level of concern about access to providers that will only get worse without immediate action. Please don't let this study follow the same pattern of the last two studies which resulted in more mounting evidence of the problem with no significant action. I ask you to please ensure



that the study findings lead to critical action during the 2024 legislative session, so that community-based mental health providers can continue to provide and grow essential support and treatment services to children and families in Moorhead and many other communities across the state of Minnesota.

Thank you for this opportunity to highlight the service needs of the families and communities we support and the drastic need to invest in mental health to sustain and grow these critical services. Please contact Erin Sutton, LSS' Senior Director of Advocacy, at erin.sutton@lssmn.org, if we may provide further information on this deeply important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "TBJ", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Trevor B. Johnson, MSW, LICSW
Senior Strategy Director – Behavioral Health
Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota